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Dr. Daniel Wallace

The Worshipful Call to Learning,
Teaching, and Learning Again

BY NEIL R. COULTER



“And then in 1997, I contracted encephalitis—a swelling of the brain—and lost most of my memory. My knowledge of Greek was at about first-year-level, and my other languages almost completely evaporated.”

When Dr. Daniel Wallace shares this fact about his life, stunned silence seems like the only appropriate response. Memory loss is always devastating. Its painful consequences are immediately obvious for a scholar who has devoted decades of his life to building his knowledge, insight, and perception in biblical studies. What happens to the goal of teaching truth when so much of your knowledge vanishes overnight? No one who knows Dan will be surprised by his response not to give up but to continue as before: learning, teaching, and relearning. “I had to relearn Greek,” Dan says, “and I taught myself Greek using the textbook that I myself had published the year before!”

Learning and teaching direct every Christian's life. We follow a Lord who invites questions and dialogue so that we will delight in Him while learning; He then sends us out into the world to pass on what we've learned (as Dr. Mark Bailey explains in this issue). We're not meant to remain static or assume we have nothing more to learn. Our faith deepens as we practice spiritual disciplines of Scripture study, such as *lectio divina*, yearly reading plans, memorization, and small-group discussions. We find answers to questions, and we also discover more questions. “Studying the Bible is risky,” affirms Dr. Wallace, “but it can handle what we throw at it.”

When Dan used his own textbook to relearn Greek, it was not the first or even the second time that he had engaged in an intensive course of Greek study. His pursuit of the language began in response to questions he encountered as a young Christian in his teenage years. Following an experience with the Holy Spirit at a revival meeting in Anaheim, California, in January 1969, Dan was fired up to read the Bible and share the gospel with everyone around him. This eventually brought him to a businessman in Costa Mesa who would sell Dan boxes of Good News Bibles to share with others—but who also made a statement that sent Dan on a quest for answers:

“You know, Jesus is not God.” Dan would later learn that this is a heretical Arian view, but that assertion sent him to the Bible to learn the truth. “If I'm going to give my life to Christ,” he thought, “I'd better be sure He's worth it.” He read the whole New Testament every week for that entire semester.

Christian leaders in Dan's life at that time didn't give satisfying answers to his question: How can we know that Jesus is God? He ended up at Biola University, and the first thing he wanted to do was learn Greek. He knew that seeking the answer had to lead him back to the original text. The first of the three times Dan learned Greek thus began, under the tutelage of Dr. Harry Sturz, then head of the language department at Biola. “He was a terrific Greek scholar,” Dan remembers. “I talked to him a lot about my question: Does the Bible say that Jesus is God? And he'd show me, ‘Yes, absolutely!’” So Dan decided to buckle down and learn Greek, so that he could better understand that confidence. But between a long Los Angeles commute to campus and unfocused study habits, he barely passed that first year. Second-year Greek, with a different professor, began with review exams, and Dan was flailing. When his professor told him, “Young man, you should not continue with Greek,” Dan faced a crisis. On his knees in his dorm room, he repented of how his poor study life had dishonored the Lord's name. “If I had been a student at UCLA,” he thought, “with a non-Christian professor, what would he think of Christians? Just because I'm on a Christian campus doesn't mean I can get away with mediocre work.” In that moment, he committed to becoming a better student—and he earned the highest grade in the class in both semesters of second-year Greek. Dan's hunger for learning motivated him to audit extra classes that he wasn't taking for credit, including Sturz's one-year course in textual criticism, the study of variants and different versions of manuscripts. This topic would continue to resonate in Dan's scholarship.

During his years at Biola, Dan was also serving as a youth director at a church pastored by Joe Aldrich (later the president of Multnomah School of the Bible). Joe loved what Dan was doing with the kids in the church, and he encouraged Dan to continue his studies at Dallas Theological Seminary. In the time between Biola and DTS, Dan knew that he needed to shore up the basics of Greek, especially the myriad forms he had never mastered. He vowed to study Greek for forty hours a week in preparation for the seminary's entrance exam. This intensive self-study marks the second time he learned Greek. He aced the exam and enrolled in second-year Greek. His hunger for learning brought him to all the classes in Greek, Hebrew, and biblical studies that were available to him. After Dan completed the ThM in 1979, Dr. Harold Hoehner invited him to stay on at DTS and teach. That was also the year Dan began work on the textbook that would eventually become the 860-page *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (1996)—and which would have unexpected connections to his own learning.

“I had to relearn Greek,” Dan says, “and I taught myself Greek using the textbook that I myself had published the year before!”

Though Dan found a passion for textual criticism and ancient manuscript study in college and seminary, exposure to actual manuscripts proved elusive. What was available to him in the 1970s was a facsimile of Codex Sinaiticus, a fourth-century manuscript of the Greek Bible that contains the oldest complete copy of the New Testament. In the library, Dan pored over that full-size facsimile, which piqued his interest in manuscripts. Later, while teaching at DTS in 1987, he took a doctoral class to view a papyrus of Romans 1, from c. AD 600, in the collection of nearby Southern Methodist University. Dan was learning the proper protocol along with his students: hands must be clean, the ink of a manuscript is never touched, pens are not allowed near the manuscript, and gum and food must remain outside the library.

Also in 1987, Dan first saw the collection of Dr. Charles Ryrie, retired dean of doctoral studies at DTS. Dr. Ryrie had built a tremendous library of original sources, including three Greek New Testament manuscripts. “He brought out stuff that was just unbelievable every time I visited him,” Dan remembers. Dan quickly saw the value in interacting with manuscripts; but Greek New Testament manuscripts were scattered throughout collections all over the world. How could a learner ever hope to access them, apart from great expense to travel to each location?

In 1995, Dan took his first overseas trip. He spent time with more than three dozen Greek New Testament manuscripts at the Cambridge University Library, and this affirmed that getting to know actual manuscripts is invaluable for students of textual criticism. His DTS colleague Dr. Hall Harris encouraged him to find some way to bring the manuscripts to the students at DTS. “You’ve got to start something,” Dr. Harris said. But those plans would be interrupted by personal challenges.

Dan taught in seminaries during the 1980s and completed a doctorate at DTS in 1995. During that time, he confronted his tendency to be too intense in his passion for learning and teaching. He quickly established his reputation as one of the seminary’s most demanding professors, but he also put that pressure on himself, pushing himself so hard—studying, teaching, publishing—that he was missing important moments in his family’s life. That realization was God’s preparation for crises his family would endure, including Dan’s own medical emergency in 1997.

“I was just overworking,” Dan says about the days leading up to the encephalitis and his collapse. “I was teaching, I was in charge of the Evangelical Theological Society’s regional conference, and I was taking on numerous last-minute tasks.” The encephalitis was debilitating. Dan spent nearly a year in a wheelchair and became very familiar with five hospitals and the Mayo Clinic. He was unable to focus on any studies for more than a few minutes a day. For several months, he slept twenty-two hours each day. He lost his memory of basic things. “I forgot my wife’s name, and I even forgot my own name a couple of times,” he says. His knowledge of French, German, and Latin disappeared, and his understanding of Hebrew and Greek reverted to beginner-level.

When he was able to return to studies, Dan decided it was time to learn Greek—for the third time, and this time from his own textbook! “I’m still in the process of relearning everything, and there are still gaps,” he says. He continues to teach Greek at DTS and participate in the scholarly community internationally.

A few years into his recovery, Dan found that technology had caught up to his vision for bringing Greek New Testament manuscripts closer to students and scholars. Advances in digital imaging and text recognition opened a door of possibility: digitize all the existing manuscripts and make high-resolution images available online to everyone. The concept could lead to unprecedented opportunities to do comparative studies of the full range of manuscripts. And so in 2002, with state-of-the-art digital cameras (up to 5 megapixels), Dan started the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts (CSNTM). His first major project was an eight-day trip to St. Catherine’s, a monastery at the base of Mt. Sinai in Egypt. While there, Dan discovered two manuscripts that the monastery didn’t realize they owned, both of which were hidden in other manuscripts.

“About fifteen percent of the manuscripts that we photograph are manuscripts that we’ve discovered,” Dan says. “We go intending to digitize something, and then we discover more.” A discovery might be made when the team notices a flyleaf, or reinforcement strips between pages, indicating that a different manuscript has been inserted. The team might also discover a *palimpsest*—evidence of earlier writing that was then scraped off and written over. About seventy-five manuscripts discovered on CSNTM expeditions appear in the current catalogue that all scholars use to know the locations and details of Greek New Testament manuscripts.

Improvements in technology enable increasingly precise work by CSNTM. The team now uses 150-megapixel cameras, making images that are as big as one gigabyte each. Those images are hundreds of times higher quality than microfilm, previously the only way of making the vast majority of manuscripts accessible. Most recently, CSNTM has begun using multispectral imaging (MSI), which photographs manuscripts via the full range of light spectra, revealing text that was previously invisible. It’s labor-intensive and expensive, but MSI will allow researchers to identify the text of even more palimpsests, water-damaged codices, and other fine details on

manuscripts. The Center backs up manuscript images in three different formats and at three locations to ensure their safety. The CSNTM website allows visitors to view images the Center’s teams have created during the past twenty years. They are “free for all and free for all time,” Dan notes.

“Over five decades, wrestling with the Greek New Testament has been for me an act of worship. It’s a spiritual discipline every bit as much as it is an intellectual one.”

This open access to so much high-quality imagery testifies to Dan’s vision for learning and teaching. His own enthusiasm to dig deeper into original sources brought him to the study of manuscripts. But beyond his own learning journey, he always wants to share what he learns with others. “CSNTM has spawned a generation of textual critics,” Dan says. “At least one-fourth of all textual critics who have earned their PhD in the last ten years have come through CSNTM—as DTS students, as my interns, or as those who were deeply involved with the Center through photographing manuscripts.” In May 2022, the Center welcomed seventy-five of the world’s top textual critics for a major conference. Thanks to the resources of CSNTM, all students of the Bible are now able to engage with original sources in a much closer way.

As Dan reflects on his studies, teaching career, scholarship, health crises, and twenty years of the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts, he sees the ways the Lord has made something more of all of it. “My study of language has never been just an academic exercise,” he asserts. “Over five decades, wrestling with the Greek New Testament has been for me an act of worship. It’s a spiritual discipline every bit as much as it is an intellectual one.”

Manuscript Detective

BY DANIEL B. WALLACE

What do scholars of textual criticism see when they examine an ancient New Testament manuscript? Dr. Daniel B. Wallace guides our eyes to some of the details he notices on pages from Gregory-Aland Manuscript 800.

Gregory-Aland Manuscript 800 (GA 800)

A twelfth- or possibly thirteenth-century Gospels codex in minuscule script. It originally contained all four Gospels; the Gospel of John is incomplete, with chapters 20 and 21 missing (the last leaf ends at Jn 19:23). Housed at the National Library of Greece in Athens, shelf number NLG 65.

LEFT PAGE

1. Note about the date and authorship of Mark's Gospel, according to ancient tradition.
2. *Hypothesis*: a technical term in Greek manuscripts for a brief introduction to the book, dealing with its subject matter, authorship, and so forth.
3. These two columns give the numbered *kephalaia*, forty-eight ancient chapter headings of the Gospel. The numbers in the margin (in Greek letters) are later repeated in the margins of the Gospel to help readers.
4. Abbreviated note stating that the two columns above this note are the *kephalaia* for the Gospel.

RIGHT PAGE

5. A longer *hypothesis* on Mark's Gospel, attributed to Cyril of Alexandria in some manuscripts. Commentary on Mark's Gospel, compiled from several church fathers.

The hypothesis continues to about halfway down the page, ending in :—, a typical section conclusion. The hypothesis wraps around the biblical text; the second half of the hypothesis is commentary on the biblical text.

6. The title "Gospel according to Mark" (only "Gospel" is spelled out). The box around the title should have been filled in with ornamentation by the illustrator; it's unknown why this was left unfinished.
7. Enlarged *ekthesis* (outdenting): The large alpha that juts out into the margin indicates the beginning of the book. The importance ascribed to portions of Scripture can sometimes be seen by the height of the initial letter; this one starts at four lines down but ascends two more notional lines.
8. The underlined words include *nomina sacra*; these are sacred words that were abbreviated with a horizontal line over them to indicate to the reader to read something different from what is written. The same system was used to read Greek letters as numbers (the Arabic numbers had not yet been invented). The words here are "Jesus Christ, Son of God," with *Jesus*, *Christ*, and *God* abbreviated (just the first and last letters of each word).
9. The underlined words on line 2 of the biblical text: "In Isaiah the prophet" (Mark 1:2). Although GA 800 is a late manuscript, here it has wording found in earlier and better manuscripts. Most late manuscripts read "in the prophets," since Mark is quoting from both Malachi and Isaiah.
10. Small written text surrounds the larger biblical text on all three sides—standard practice to distinguish commentary from Scripture in ways that showed the priority of Scripture. The Bible is front and center in this manuscript,



PHOTOGRAPHED BY CSNTM

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and commentary is in a smaller, wraparound hand. The commentary is something of an anthology, with comments taken from many church fathers. The passage on this page is Mark 1:1-3.

Closing Remarks

Manuscripts often had commentaries, and the text was distinguished from the commentary in some way to show its priority.

Even from earliest times in copying the New Testament, scribes offered helps for readers. In this instance, the hypotheses (both of them), kephalaia, numbering system, nomina sacra, enlarged ekthesis, and ornamented (incomplete) headpiece are used to help the reader understand and focus on key items.



Scan here to learn more about Dr. Wallace and the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts.

Dr. Daniel B. Wallace (ThM, 1979; PhD, 1995)

Daniel is Senior Research Professor of New Testament Studies at DTS and the executive director of the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts. He has been a consultant for several Bible translations and has written, edited, or contributed to more than three dozen books and numerous articles.